

Cultural Blending

CASE STUDY: The Safavid Empire

MAIN IDEA

CULTURAL INTERACTION The Safavid Empire produced a rich and complex blended culture in Persia.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Modern Iran, which plays a key role in global politics, descended from the culturally diverse Safavid Empire.

TERMS & NAMES

- Safavid
- Isma'il
- shah
- Shah Abbas
- Esfahan

SETTING THE STAGE Throughout the course of world history, cultures have interacted with each other. Often such interaction has resulted in the mixing of different cultures in new and exciting ways. This process is referred to as cultural blending. The **Safavid** Empire, a Shi'ite Muslim dynasty that ruled in Persia between the 16th and 18th centuries, provides a striking example of how interaction among peoples can produce a blending of cultures. This culturally diverse empire drew from the traditions of Persians, Ottomans, and Arabs.

TAKING NOTES

Drawing Conclusions

Identify examples of cultural blending in the Safavid Empire.



Patterns of Cultural Blending

Each time a culture interacts with another, it is exposed to ideas, technologies, foods, and ways of life not exactly like its own. Continental crossroads, trade routes, ports, and the borders of countries are places where cultural blending commonly begins. Societies that are able to benefit from cultural blending are those that are open to new ways and are willing to adapt and change. The blended ideas spread throughout the culture and produce a new pattern of behavior. Cultural blending has several basic causes.

Causes of Cultural Blending Cultural change is most often prompted by one or more of the following four activities:

- migration
- pursuit of religious freedom or conversion
- trade
- conquest

The blending that contributed to the culture of the Ottomans, which you just read about in Section 1, depended on all of these activities. Surrounded by the peoples of Christian Byzantium, the Turks were motivated to win both territory for their empire and converts to their Muslim religion. The Ottoman Empire's location on a major trading route created many opportunities for contact with different cultures. Suleyman's interest in learning and culture prompted him to bring the best foreign artists and scholars to his court. They brought new ideas about art, literature, and learning to the empire.

Results of Cultural Blending Cultural blending may lead to changes in language, religion, styles of government, the use of technology, and military tactics.

Cultural Blending			
Location	Interacting Cultures	Reason for Interaction	Some Results of Interaction
India—1000 B.C.	Aryan and Dravidian Indian Arab, African, Indian	Migration	Vedic culture, forerunner of Hinduism
East Africa—A.D. 700	Islamic, Christian	Trade, religious conversion	New trade language, Swahili
Russia—A.D. 1000	Christian and Slavic	Religious conversion	Eastern Christianity, Russian identity
Mexico—A.D. 1500	Spanish and Aztec	Conquest	Mestizo culture, Mexican Catholicism
United States—A.D. 1900	European, Asian, Caribbean	Migration, religious freedom	Cultural diversity
SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts 1. Determining Main Ideas <i>What are the reasons for interaction in the Americas?</i> 2. Hypothesizing <i>What are some aspects of cultural diversity?</i>			

These changes often reflect unique aspects of several cultures. For example:

- **Language** Sometimes the written characters of one language are used in another, as in the case of written Chinese characters used in the Japanese language. In the Safavid Empire, the language spoken was Persian. But after the area converted to Islam, a significant number of Arabic words appeared in the Persian language.
- **Religion and ethical systems** Buddhism spread throughout Asia. Yet the Buddhism practiced by Tibetans is different from Japanese Zen Buddhism.
- **Styles of government** The concept of a democratic government spread to many areas of the globe. Although the basic principles are similar, it is not practiced exactly the same way in each country.
- **Racial or ethnic blending** One example is the mestizo, people of mixed European and Indian ancestry who live in Mexico.
- **Arts and architecture** Cultural styles may be incorporated or adapted into art or architecture. For example, Chinese artistic elements are found in Safavid Empire tiles and carpets as well as in European paintings.

The chart above shows other examples of cultural blending that have occurred over time in various areas of the world. **A**

▼ Grandson of Isma'il, Shah Abbas led the Safavid Empire during its Golden Age.

CASE STUDY: The Safavid Empire

The Safavids Build an Empire

Conquest and ongoing cultural interaction fueled the development of the Safavid Empire. Originally, the Safavids were members of an Islamic religious brotherhood named after their founder, Safi al-Din. In the 15th century, the Safavids aligned themselves with the Shi'a branch of Islam.

The Safavids were also squeezed geographically between the Ottomans and Uzbek tribespeople and the Mughal Empire. (See the map on page 514.) To protect themselves from these potential enemies, the Safavids concentrated on building a powerful army.

Isma'il Conquers Persia The Safavid military became a force to reckon with. In 1499, a 12-year-old named **Isma'il** (ihs•MAH•eel) began to seize most of what is now Iran. Two years later he completed the task.



MAIN IDEA

Recognizing Effects

A Which of the effects of cultural blending do you think is the most significant? Explain.



To celebrate his achievement, he took the ancient Persian title of **shah**, or king. He also established Shi'a Islam as the state religion.

Isma'il became a religious tyrant. Any citizen who did not convert to Shi'ism was put to death. Isma'il destroyed the Sunni population of Baghdad in his confrontation with the Ottomans. Their leader, Selim the Grim, later ordered the execution of all Shi'a in the Ottoman Empire. As many as 40,000 died. Their final face-off took place at the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514. Using artillery, the Ottomans pounded the Safavids into defeat. Another outcome of the battle was to set the border between the two empires. It remains the border today between Iran and Iraq.

Isma'il's son Tahmasp learned from the Safavids' defeat at Chaldiran. He adopted the use of artillery with his military forces. He expanded the Safavid Empire up to the Caucasus Mountains, northeast of Turkey, and brought Christians under Safavid rule. Tahmasp laid the groundwork for the golden age of the Safavids. **B**

MAIN IDEA

Drawing Conclusions

B How did Tahmasp's cultural borrowing lead to the expansion of the Safavid Empire? **B**

A Safavid Golden Age

Shah Abbas, or Abbas the Great, took the throne in 1587. He helped create a Safavid culture and golden age that drew from the best of the Ottoman, Persian, and Arab worlds.

Reforms Shah Abbas reformed aspects of both military and civilian life. He limited the power of the military and created two new armies that would be loyal to him alone. One of these was an army of Persians. The other was a force that Abbas recruited from the Christian north and modeled after the Ottoman janissaries. He equipped both of these armies with modern artillery.


Abbas also reformed his government. He punished corruption severely and promoted only officials who proved their competence and loyalty. He hired foreigners from neighboring countries to fill positions in the government.

To convince European merchants that his empire was tolerant of other religions, Abbas brought members of Christian religious orders into the empire. As a result, Europeans moved into the land. Then industry, trade, and art exchanges grew between the empire and European nations.

A New Capital The Shah built a new capital at **Esfahan**. With a design that covered four and a half miles, the city was considered one of the most beautiful in the world. It was a showplace for the many artisans, both foreign and Safavid, who worked on the buildings and the objects in them. For example, 300 Chinese potters produced

glazed building tiles for the buildings in the city, and Armenians wove carpets.

Art Works Shah Abbas brought hundreds of Chinese artisans to Esfahan. Working with Safavid artists, they produced intricate metalwork, miniature paintings, calligraphy, glasswork, tile work, and pottery. This collaboration gave rise to artwork that blended Chinese and Persian ideas. These decorations beautified the many mosques, palaces, and marketplaces.


Carpets The most important result of Western influence on the Safavids, however, may have been the demand for Persian carpets. This demand helped change carpet weaving from a local craft to a national industry. In the beginning, the carpets reflected traditional Persian themes. As the empire became more culturally blended, the designs incorporated new themes. In the 16th century, Shah Abbas sent artists to Italy to study under the Renaissance artist Raphael. Rugs then began to reflect European designs. 



▲ The Masjid-e-Imam mosque in Esfahan is a beautiful example of the flowering of the arts in the Safavid Empire.

MAIN IDEA

Comparing

 In what ways were Shah Abbas and Suleyman the Lawgiver similar?

The Dynasty Declines Quickly

In finding a successor, Shah Abbas made the same mistake the Ottoman monarch Suleyman made. He killed or blinded his ablest sons. His incompetent grandson, Safi, succeeded Abbas. This pampered young prince led the Safavids down the same road to decline that the Ottomans had taken, only more quickly.

In 1736, however, Nadir Shah Afshar conquered land all the way to India and created an expanded empire. But Nadir Shah was so cruel that one of his own troops assassinated him. With Nadir Shah's death in 1747, the Safavid Empire fell apart.

At the same time that the Safavids flourished, cultural blending and conquest led to the growth of a new empire in India, as you will learn in Section 3.

SECTION

2

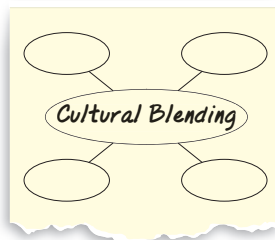
ASSESSMENT

TERMS & NAMES 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Safavid
- Isma'il
- shah
- Shah Abbas
- Esfahan

USING YOUR NOTES

2. What are some examples of cultural blending in the Safavid Empire?



MAIN IDEAS

3. What are the four causes of cultural blending?
4. What reforms took place in the Safavid Empire under Shah Abbas?
5. Why did the Safavid Empire decline so quickly?

CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **FORMING OPINIONS** Which of the results of cultural blending do you think has the most lasting effect on a country? Explain.
7. **DRAWING CONCLUSIONS** How did the location of the Safavid Empire contribute to the cultural blending in the empire?
8. **ANALYZING MOTIVES** Why might Isma'il have become so intolerant of the Sunni Muslims?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **CULTURAL INTERACTION** Write a **letter** from Shah Abbas to a Chinese artist persuading him to come teach and work in the Safavid Empire.

INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY INTERNET ACTIVITY

Use the Internet to research the charge that Persian rugs are largely made by children under the age of 14. Write a television documentary **script** detailing your research results.

INTERNET KEYWORD

child labor rug making